Willow, the Vampire Slayer

by GarrettCRW

Summary

Into each generation, a Slayer is born. One girl, in all the world, a Chosen One. One born with the strength and skill to hunt the vampires, to stop the spread of evil, and the swell of their numbers. She is the Slayer. And this time, it's...Willow?
Chapter 1

"He-Hello?"

Willow walked timidly into the library, holding onto the hall pass she had just received, summoning her here. Not that she was afraid—she probably spent more time in the room than anyone else in the school. It was what she had heard about the new librarian. Granted, most of it was from Cordelia (Does she have to let everyone know when something doesn't go her way?), but even Xander and Jesse were freaked by this guy.

And now she had to talk to him.

She walked up to the main desk, looking around for signs of life, which were quite absent. "M-Mr. Giles?"

Almost if by magic, a middle-aged man dressed in a tweed suit emerged from the book stacks. "I'm sorry about that. You must be Willow." Approaching the girl, the man seemed almost like an oversized teenager as he nervously walked to her, and shook her hand. "I'm Mr. Giles, and I have some important news to discuss with you."

"OK..." answered the young woman, now adding confusion to her already existent fear.

"Into each generation, a Slayer is born. One girl, in all the world, a Chosen One. One born with the strength and skill to hunt the vampires, to stop the spread of evil, and the swell of their numbers."

After spouting the almost practiced words to the now skeptical girl, the new librarian added, "Willow Rosenberg, you are that girl."

"Me?"

"Yes, you," he affirmed. "The previous Slayer was killed last spring in Los Angeles. I'm sure you heard about the fire which leveled a high school gym at, Hemery, I think it was, correct?"

"Y-yes," stammered Willow, slowly becoming unable to process all of the information being given to her. "They said that some girl named Buffy started it, and was killed. What does this have to do with me?"

"You are no longer Willow Rosenberg, student at Sunnydale High School. You are Willow, the Vampire Slayer."

"No," declared Willow as she backed away fearfully. "No!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Rosenberg, but this is who you now are. This is your destiny." Giles had barely become this child's Watcher, and was already hating it. From what the Watcher's Council had given him, this Willow was completely unlike every other Slayer that he had read about. She was, for starters, a certified genius. Also, she was frightfully timid. Unlike most other Slayers, who were generally outgoing, popular young girls, Willow had but three friends in the world: another girl, Amy Madison, and two boys, Jesse McNally and Alexander Harris. The Harris boy had especially concerned the Council, as there were specific instructions on how to keep him from interfering with the new Slayer's mission.

But all that mattered right now was the girl standing before him, now in tears. "I-I can't be a 'Vampire Slayer'. Vampires don't even exist! Besides, I'm supposed to be in chemistry right now, helping Xander with our lab, and getting an 'A' so I can get a scholarship at some prestigious
college."

"I wish it were true, but vampires *are* real, and you *are* the Slayer." Changing his approach, Mr. Giles asked, "Have you ever experienced moments of superhuman strength in times of great stress? Had dreams that mysteriously came true? Sensed great evil where none existed?"

Willow’s face became pale as she remembered incidents where all of these things came true. She had broken Harmony’s wrist when the lead "Cordette" (as she and Xander called them) pushed her in the hallway outside gym class three weeks ago. And her dreams had always come true. *Except the ones about Xander, that is,* she reminded herself with a frown. And there were times that she would be enjoying herself at the Bronze when she’d suddenly become completely wigged out for no reason—so much so, that Xander would have to walk her home and spend the night, sleeping on the floor. "Oh, God, it…it's true. I'm going to faint now, OK?"

Her Watcher followed his job description and watched as Willow fainted, landing on the ground with a loud THUNK.
"Hey Willow," blurted out Xander as he saw his friend leave the library. "So, what happened in the library?"

"Oh, nothing," responded Willow, still in shock from learning that she was a Vampire Slayer. "Nothing at all. You know me; no excitement here."

Xander most certainly did know Willow—so much, in fact, that he could immediately tell that something was up. "You were gone for all of chemistry, Will," he said. "Besides, you're starting to talk too fast."

"Talking fast? I'm not talking fast! I'm talking at my normal speed, because if I were talking fast, that'd mean that I was nervous, and I'm not nervous, so I can't be talking fast." Once she finished, Willow looked at Xander, and her face immediately lost even more of its natural optimism. "I was babbling, wasn't I?"

"Uh huh. So," declared the boy, getting back to his question, "what happened in there?"

"I can't tell you, Xander."

Willow’s statement hurt Xander deeply. So deeply, in fact, that for a moment he realized just how much he loved the woman standing in front of him. The moment was soon gone, though, but the pain still lingered. "Will, you’ve never hid anything from me before."

"I know," she answered remorsefully. "It's just that...this thing, it's come up, and you wouldn't believe what it was, even if I told you." She smirked before admitting, "I'm not even sure I believe it."

"Willow," Xander pleaded, becoming more and more afraid of his friend’s grave tone. "I'd never doubt you. You're my best friend, remember?"

"I know. But this is different." The new Slayer looked at her best friend, the young man that she loved more than life itself, and said, "I'm going to be out most nights, now Xander, doing things that might seem strange you and Jesse and Amy and everyone else. But you have to remember..." Willow took in a deep breath before continuing. Even though she was now probably going to die some horrible death any day, she could barely muster the courage to reveal her true feelings to Xander. Why did this have to happen? Why couldn't he have noticed me before? Why didn't I tell him this before? "You have to remember," she repeated, "that I love you. I always have, and I always will. But I can't be your friend anymore."

With that, Willow kissed Xander on the cheek, and quickly disappeared in the sea of students. He stood there for an untold amount of time, his heart broken and his soul shattered. _Something's wrong, thought Xander angrily as he clenched his fists, and I'm going to find out what._

Willow walked through the cemetery with her Watcher, receiving tutelage while she patrolled. "So, let me get this right: the vampire sucks my blood, then I suck its blood, and then I'm a vampire?"

"That's correct," affirmed Mr. Giles, pleased with how well Willow was grasping the ins and outs of slaying. "And now, what kills the vampires?"

"That's easy," stated the Slayer. "Fire, a wooden stake through the heart, and beheading. Crosses,
garlic, and holy water hurt them, but it's harder to kill them using that stuff."

"Precisely. I take it you had no problem reading the Slayer's Guide?"

"No," she lied, very much not in agreement with a lot of the things stated in the tome.

"Then you understand why you must separate yourself from your friends and family," replied the Watcher, making more of a statement than asking Willow a question.

"No," answered Willow, still raw from what she had been told to do to Xander. Her Xander. "No, I don't. I'm not even like any of these girls! They're all self-assured and popular and pretty, and I'm...me. I lost it on the first day of Kindergarten because I broke the yellow crayon! I can't do this without my friends, Giles. They're everything to me."

"And they would be in constant danger if you told them of your identity," he fired back sternly. "The Slayer is a conduit for mystical powers of untold strength. Vampires desire your blood in the hopes of gaining your powers. Dark mages wish to turn you to the dark side so that you may serve their evil purposes. By letting your friends know that you are the Slayer, you will expose them to these dark forces, who would see fit to use your friends in order to harm you."

"And maybe I don't care!" shouted the Slayer before turning her back to the older man. "Maybe I want my friends to be around. Maybe I don't want to have to push away my best friend, who I'm in love with, just because some vampire who wants to suck his blood anyways is going to try to use him for bait. And maybe I don't care about the stupid vampire that's standing behind you like some big mean person who thinks he's really cool because he gets to laugh at the sad little Slayer while she cries in front of her clueless Watcher."

Giles turned around reflexively and jumped when he saw, lo and behold, a vampire standing there, smiling and in full game face. He hit the Watcher, sending him flying into a headstone as if he were no more than a stuffed animal. "Hello, Slayer," replied the demon, looking upon the girl hungrily as she trembled before it with nothing more than a stake in her hand.

"Get away," warned Willow, "or I'll beat you up."

The vampire laughed at the Slayer's pitiful threat and charged. Much to Willow's surprise, she punched him with enough force to knock her foe backwards. The vampire chuckled as he regained his balance, announcing, "Perhaps you will 'beat me up', Slayer."

"Oh, shut up," sneered Willow as she gave him a resounding uppercut. The force of the blow left the demon dazed long enough for her to stake it.

Willow screamed loudly as the vampire exploded into a shower of dust. "Giles! What WAS THAT!?"

"Huh?" he asked, still sitting against the headstone, quite likely suffering from a concussion. "Oh, the vampire?" he asked in a "You-didn't-know?" tone of voice. "That's what vampires do when they are defeated-they turn to dust."

"OK," panted out the Slayer as she recovered from the exertion of energy, "so they turn to dust. That sounds like a vampirey sort of thing to do." Once she had returned to a state of rest, she went into hysteric. "I'm fighting vampires, and they turn to dust! I'm fighting VAMPIRES! I can't do this! I...I..." Then, Willow fell to her knees, sobbing uncontrollably. "I can't do this! I can't kill vampires for the rest of my life! I don't want to! I want to be a normal girl, and worry about school, and worry about getting Xander to notice me, and...and..."
Some distance away, Xander watched in a state of utter disbelief as Willow, his Willow, killed the vampire. Then, when he saw her start to cry, Xander began to act, perhaps for the first time in his life. "Willow?" he said, standing up and walking towards her. "Willow!" he shouted, picking up his pace. "Will-oof!"

"Ah ah ah," scolded a female vampire as she tackled the boy. Dressed in a perversion of a Catholic school girl's outfit, she was both seductive and deadly. "No fair crying out for your girlfriend the Slayer."

"She's not my girlfriend!" hissed Xander as he struggled to free himself from the grip of this mysterious blonde woman.

"Sure," replied the vampire skeptically. "Because no one has ever used that line before."

Xander looked at this woman like she was insane. "I admit that it's a bit overused, but if you just let me go, we can settle this like reasonable adults."

"Oh, I'm sorry," replied the vampire, "but that's not how it works. You see, this is where I torture you for information, kill you, and then string up your entrails outside the Slayer's house."

As the vampire shifted into her game face, Xander gasped, and did the only thing a self-respecting man could do. He sluggéd the vampire, screamed like a little girl, and ran.
Chapter 3

"Help!"

Willow jumped to attention when her enhanced hearing became aware of the distant cry. "Xander?"

"Somebody help me!" shouted the voice again, this time unmistakably belonging to Willow's best friend. Not just because it was closer (and thereby easier for her to hear), but because it added, in true Xander fashion, "Superman, Lois, Jimmy, Perry White, anybody, help!"

"Xander!" shouted Willow nervously. "Xander, where are you!?"

"Is this what you're looking for?" Willow and Mr. Giles whirled around to see a blonde vampire holding a squirming Xander by the collar of his shirt. "But you really have to ask yourself, 'Is he really worth it?' I mean, come on! He screams like a girl."

"Put him down," pleaded the panicky Slayer. "Please?"

"Or what?" hissed the vampire. "You'll stake me? Please. You've been a Slayer for like two minutes. I've been killing girls like you for centuries. We have a bit of an experience gap, and in my favor."

"Please put him down," requested Willow, who was now visibly shaking with fear and anxiety.

"God, you are pathetic!" announced the vamp, now clearly disgusted with her foe. "Please let him go, Miss Vampire! And your clothes! Been to the softer side of Sears much?" Bored with the verbal assault, the vampire said, "So, should I kill your boyfriend first, or your Watcher? Or, better yet, should I turn Squirmy here into a vampire so I can have lots of depraved sex with him for the next thousand years?"

"You do, and I swear I'll kill you," answered Willow darkly.

"God, what a moron!" replied vampire indignantly. "Hello, vampire here! I'm already dead!"

Willow, who was openly sobbing now, snapped. She responded with an almost instinctual anger as she said, "Put my friend down or I'll kick your skanky, pretentious, undead ass."

"Ooh, the nice girl is mad now," joked the vampire, doubting that this new Slayer could back up her bold threat. Turning her attention to Xander, she replied, "Your girlfriend sure is ugly when she's cranky, you know that, don't you? Wide eyes and flaring nostrils are so not attractive."

"Actually, I think she's kind of sexy when she gets upset," answered Xander with a slightly timid honesty. Realizing what he had just admitted to, the boy asked, "Did I just say that out loud?"

"Jesus," declared the vamp, the disgust practically dripping off her tongue as she spoke. "You're just as bad as Red here. Geeky, *no* fashion sense, innocent...and completely stupid."

"Excuse me," interrupted the Slayer. "You, me, fight...remember?"

"Oh yeah," answered the vampire. "Bring it on, sister." The vamp tossed Xander right into Mr. Giles, letting out a triumphant chuckle as both men were thrown into a large headstone, knocking them both out. "Well, that was too easy. So, what about you? Should I start cowering in fear before the almighty Slayer?"
Willow said nothing. Instead, she threw a punch that knocked back her opponent, leaving the vampire momentarily stunned. "Will you please shut up! We could have been done with this five minutes ago, but no, you have to talk. And talk. And talk. Please tell me that you weren't this annoying when you were alive."

For once, Willow's opponent was put off guard. "Well, what can I say? I like to play with my food."

Willow brought her fist up fiercely, clocking the demon right in the nose. "Yeah, probably not the best idea." She then stomped on the vampire's foot, further disorienting the demon. Willow then pressed her advantage, punching her foe in the stomach and following with a head butt.

Dazed and on her knees, the vampire gasped for the air she didn't need and said, "Wow, you're pretty good." The vampire recovered, however, with an uppercut that knocked Willow to the ground. "But it won't be enough, Slayer. The Order of Aurelius will rise and level this town, and there's no way you can stop it." With that, the blonde vampire ran off, leaving Willow to question what she had just been told.

"Um, hello?" called out Xander, who was trying to stand up. "Best friend with possible head trauma here..."

Willow shouted out Xander's name gleefully before rushing to him, smiling as she hugged him warmly. The smile soon faded, however, replaced with a scowl as the Slayer angrily hit her friend. "What are you doing here!? You could have been killed...or worse."

"I couldn't just let you leave me like that, Will," replied Xander. "I mean, you're my Willow, my best friend." Searching inside himself for a few seconds, Xander came back from his reverie, adding, "I guess what I'm saying, Will, is that I think that I'm, well, you know..."

"Yes, Xander?" asked Willow, now hanging onto his every word.

"OK," announced Xander, taking a deep breath before proceeding. "Willow, I know I should have realized this a long time ago, but I am deeply, madly, totally, head over heels, in lo-"

"Excuse me," replied Giles in an exceedingly British tone of voice, "but are either of you going to help me up?"

"Oh, murmured the Slayer. "Yeah." Willow and Xander each gave the librarian a helping hand, and soon the three were on their way. "Are you OK, Mr. Giles?"

"Quite alright, yes," he answered, "And you two?"

"I'm fine," responded Xander, "considering the fact that I was just attacked in a cemetery by a vampire!"

"Yes," replied the older man, "I could see how that would be disturbing."

"Disturbing!?" shouted Xander hysterically. "I almost got killed by a vampire! A vampire my best friend just beat the crap out of before it ran off bragged about some order of whatsit's! That isn't just disturbing, that's insane!" After the initial shock faded, Xander finally realized the full gravity of the situation. Unsurprisingly, all emotion drained from his face as he whispered, "Willow, I almost died."

"Almost," echoed Willow gravely.

"You saved my life, Will," said Xander as he embraced the Slayer. "How can I ever repay you?"
"Well," replied Willow as a devilish grin emerged on her face, "you could always take me out on a date tomorrow night..."

Xander gulped loudly. "A date?"

"Yes, a date," answered the Slayer, giving him her most innocent and charming smile in response to his question. "You know, that thing two people do when they decide that they like each other, and like being friends with each other, but decide that they like each other more, and possibly in a way that leads to kissing and groping?"

Xander began stammering furiously, clearly outclassed by Willow's surprisingly enticing argument. Giles, however, was perfectly capable of coherent speech, and he had more than enough to say, to boot. "Willow, as the Slayer, it is your duty to ensure the safety of Sunnydale by patrolling nightly, a-and not running around, chasing boys."

"I read the handbook, Giles," replied Willow.

"There's a handbook?" asked Xander.

"Yes," announced Giles. "And one of the most important concepts discussed in the Slayer's Handbook states specifically that the Slayer is not to reveal her identity to anyone, to say nothing of having any emotional attachments, for danger of any unnecessary harm coming to the people around her."

"It's too late for that, Giles!" argued the Slayer. "As I told you already, I love Xander!" Realizing what she had just announced for the entire world, and Xander, to hear, she immediately backtracked. "He's my best friend! That's a bit more than an 'emotional attachment', don't you think?" The Watcher's response, a simple look of resigned agreement, did little to stop Willow's tirade. "I'm not letting go of my friends, case closed, and I'm not letting go of Xander. Ever. And if you can't deal with that, then I guess you need to find yourself another girl to be the Slayer, because I quit."

Turning to her friend, the Slayer said, "Come on, Xander, let's go home," before storming away from the perplexed Watcher furiously.
Chapter 4

Willow walked up to Jesse, who was (as usual) trailing Cordelia, and tapped on his shoulder. "Hey, Jesse, have you seen Xander?"

"Yeah, I did. He-" Jesse turned around and went into shock as he saw Willow. Not only was she wearing makeup, but she had a blouse and a short skirt on. Jesse looked down and saw that Willow was even wearing high heels, a first for her. Simply put, she was dressed to kill. "Wow, Willow," declared Jesse after finding his voice again, "you look almost as good as Cordelia."

"Gee...thanks," replied the Slayer sullenly, not very comfortable with her friend's idea of a good compliment. "So, where's Xander?"

Jesse was again lusting after the Great Bitch Queen of Sunnydale, and barely acknowledged Willow's inquiry, until she glared at him. "Oh, I thought you had already seen him once I saw you, seeing as how he was totally out of it."

"Really?" beamed Willow. "You thought Xander had noticed me?"

"Let's hope not," sneered Cordelia, as she walked up to Willow and Jesse. "There's nothing more sickening than two geeks in love."

"At least I can fall in love," answered Willow icily. "Seeing as how I have this thing called a 'heart'. It's something that only people have."

"Ooh," taunted the cheerleader to her flock. "Little Willow's grown herself a backbone. What is the world coming to?"

"Well, it's about time someone did the world a favor and let you know how much of bitch you are," hissed Willow as she turned to leave.

"Hey!" whined Cordy as she placed a hand on Willow's shoulder. "I'm not through with you yet!"

"Well, I am," replied Willow as she grabbed onto Cordelia's arm, and instinctively flipped her to the ground, stunning everyone who saw the move.

"Oh, you are so going to pay for that," declared Cordelia as she began to rise.

"With what," asked Willow, "your biting commentary?" The Slayer smiled darkly at her opponent as she warned, "If you know what's good for you, Cordelia, you'll leave me and my friends alone from now on." No one said anything as Willow left; there was time for gossip later. Now was the time to stare.

Escaping the chaos behind her, Willow spotted Xander and ran over to him. "Hey Xand," she replied, trying to act as cheerful as possible.

Xander didn't bother to look at his friend; instead, he found his feet more interesting. "Hi Will," he murmured.

"Is something wrong?" asked the Slayer with growing worry.

"Not really," came the pensive response from Xander. "Just thinking about stuff."
"Yeah," agreed Willow. "I've been doing that a lot lately, myself. Finding out that I'm the Chosen One, destined to fight evil-it's kinda disturbing."

"Didn't stop you from tossing Cordy around," said Xander with a sly grin on his face. "You're a naughty girl, Will."

"Well, she deserved it," she responded in her own defense. "Besides, it was kind of fun. Except for the rush of power thing."

"How so?"

"I **enjoyed** threatening her, Xander," affirmed Willow, almost afraid of herself as she spoke. "I can't let that happen again-ever."

"So," noted the boy, "does this mean you're going to be sucking up to Giles today?"

"Exactly." Changing the subject, Willow asked Xander with a hopeful glint in her eye, "So, have you noticed anything different about me today?"

Xander looked over at his friend, and immediately noticed the difference. "Will, you look...I mean..." Instead of finishing the thought, Xander grabbed the Slayer, bringing her into his arms in a passionate embrace, kissing her with everything he had. Willow melted into his arms as the kiss continued, not caring about the stares they were drawing from the students around them, until....

"Xander?"

Xander left his fantasy world with a start as he fumbled for an answer to the question before him. "What? Oh, uh, Willow...did you change your hair or something?"

Willow frowned openly as the bell rang. "Guess it's time for class. See you in chemistry?"

"Yes," whispered Xander throatily. "We have chemistry." Quickly covering, he added, "We have it together. The class. And I'll see you there, after the class I don't have with you." Willow sighed as Xander left, wishing once again for chemistry of the non-educational kind between her and her best friend, just as Xander was trying desperately to shake the attraction that was growing in his heart.

Deep beneath Sunnydale High, things were as active below ground as they were above it. However, the intentions below were far more sinister in nature.

A number of figures stood around a large pool of blood in the midst of a most profane ceremony. These figures, parted like the Red Sea as a burly man came to the fore. Or the figure was once a man, like the other people there. Now, he was a soulless demon, a vampire, and he kneeled before the pool and began chanting.

"The sleeper shall awaken, and the world shall bleed. The sleeper shall awaken, and the world shall bleed." Looking up at the cross above their heads, the vampire smiled hungrily as he finished his prayer. "The sleeper shall awaken, and the world shall bleed...Amen."
Chapter 5

Slowly rising from the pool of blood was a horrible, unholy figure. Shaped like a man and dressed entirely in black leather, this creature had bat-like features, and was in general an unpleasant and horrible looking creature. "I take it you have news for me?"

"Yes, Master," answered the kneeling vampire. "There is a new Slayer…..and she is here in Sunnydale."

"And have you seen this new Slayer, Luke?"

"I have not," replied Luke, "but Darla has faced her."

"Interesting," said the Master contemplatively. "And what have you to say, Darla?"

"She is strong," declared the blonde vampire, "but untrained and undisciplined. And she is in love with a miserable little whelp."

"A Slayer in love?" mused the Master. "How….fascinating. Does the Slayer have a name?"

"She's called Willow," answered Darla, "and the boy is called Xander."

"The boy is of no interest to me," snarled the Master, "unless we can use the Slayer's affection for him against her. What I'm concerned about is the Harvest. Do you think she will be able to stop it?"

Confidently, Darla replied, "Only if she finds out about it. And even then, she lacks experience."

"Good," said the Master with an acidic grin on his evil face. "But still, we must make sure she is properly distracted. Perhaps this boyfriend of hers, or someone else close to her, can be targeted."

"I'm sure I can think of something," grinned the blonde vampire evilly.

"Miss Rosenberg!" scolded Willow and Xander's chemistry teacher, Dr. Gregory, for what seemed like the millionth time that period. The two had been constantly taking more of an interest in their own growing personal chemistry than that of the lecture at hand. If today had been a lab day, they would probably have already blown up the school.

"Sorry!" answered the Slayer, repeating an equally common refrain.

"I suggest you leave chasing boys for some time other than during my class." Willow and Xander blushed furiously, enough to match the dark red locks of her hair. More importantly, it was yet another thing for Willow's classmates to gossip about as they regarded her increasingly strange and erratic behavior. (That Cordelia was present for this incident as well only further insured the redhead's growing infamy.)

"Now that we have your attention, Miss Rosenberg, would you mind completing the equation for the rest of the class?"

Now this was something that Willow could handle. After standing up and straightening her blouse, Willow walked up to the chalkboard with a shaky confidence, and easily completed the equation before her. Dr. Gregory, like most at Sunnydale High, had long since become used to Willow being
ahead of the curve, and kept a perfect poker face as the Slayer asked brightly, "Is there anything else, Dr. Gregory?"

Before the kindly, white-haired teacher could respond, the end-of-period bell rang loudly and far too conveniently. Willow went to the hall as everyone else gathered their things, and waited dutifully for Xander, who faithfully (at the expense of his masculinity) emerged from class with Willow's book bag draped around his shoulder. "So, are you headed to the library for some hardcore groveling action?"

Accepting her book bag, Willow said, "I might as well get it out of the way. Maybe if I'm lucky he'll still let me go out tonight for, you know....." The left of the sentence was left unfinished, but Willow's blush told the rest of the story.

Xander's heart skipped a few beats before saying, "D-do you n-need me.....?"

"No, I'll be OK," answered Willow with a nervous smile. "I mean, he's just a librarian, right? How scary could he possibly be?"

"Yeah," agreed Xander with a nervous smile of his own, "I guess you're-"

"What?!" shouted the unmistakable voice of Cordelia Chase in the distance. "Who would stick a body in Aura's locker?"

Willow and Xander shared a frightened, knowing look as they rushed over to Cordelia and the near-hysterical redhead Cordette she was speaking to. "Who died?"

"Who cares?!" asked the Cordette. "Aura's in shock, and all this stress is going to make me break out in hives, and you're worried about some creepy dead guy?"

"Homework gives you hives, Aphrodesia," fired back Xander sarcastically.

"So, uh, how did he die?" asked Willow, hoping for a mundane cause of death.

"I don't know," answered Aphrodesia with a heaping load of sass. "He was like, dead!"

"Were there any marks on him?"

Aphrodesia looked at Willow as if she had grown an extra head. "Like I'm going to check out some dead guy!"

"Who even asked you two losers to join this conversation, anyways?" Despite being as cruel as ever, there was just enough of a hint of fear in Cordelia's voice to make both Willow and Xander's mouths curl into the slightest of smiles. "For all we know, it was you two that killed him."

Willow was annoyed at the accusation as she told Cordelia, "Remember our little 'chat' about compassion? I'm trying to show some here." Not wanting to belabor the point any further, Willow simply shared a look with Xander before taking off for the girls' locker room.

"See what I mean, Aphrodesia?" whined Cordelia. "Rosenberg grows a spine, and it goes right to her head."

Willow arrived at the locker room just in time to see Principal Flutie surreptitiously closing the door.
As usual, he looked stressed beyond belief, and he literally jumped as he turned and saw the concerned face of one of his students. "Oh! Miss Rosenberg!" With a suspicious note to his voice, he added, "Uh, what do you want?"

"Is it true that there's someone dead in the locker room?"

"Where did you hear that?" asked Principal Flutie nervously before relenting. "OK. Yes." And without even the slightest hint of irony he added, "But he's not a student! Not Currently."

"Do you know how he died?" asked Willow in a hopeful tone of voice that Flutie found to be disconcerting.

"What?"

Covering for herself, Willow said, "What I mean is, how could something awful like this have possibly happen?" Her facial expression, which alternated between gritting her teeth out of frustration and smiling nervously, made the lie painfully obvious.

However, Principal Flutie was seemingly unfazed as he explained, "Well, that's for the police to determine when they get here. But this structure is safe, we have inspections, and I think there's no grounds for a lawsuit."

"Was there a lot of blood?" asked Willow hopefully. After getting no answer, she asked with far less optimism, she asked, "Was there any blood?"

"I would think you wouldn't want to involve yourself in this kind of thing," replied Principal Flutie.

Willow felt a chill run down her spine as she realized that she didn't have a choice in the matter. With her hands balled into tight fists and her head bowed, she whispered, "I don't want to," before asking out loud with her bravest voice, "Can I take just a little peek?"

With a skeptical eye, the principal continued his previous thought. "Unless you already are involved..."

More nervous than ever, Willow backed off and said, "Never mind!"

Flutie showed some legitimate sympathy as he told Willow, "Look, I understand this is confusing. You're probably feeling a lot right now. You should share those feelings." However, that real concern was quickly wiped away when he added, "With someone else."

"O-OK," answered Willow warily before leaving.

Unbeknownst to Principal Flutie, Willow just started to circle around the building, eventually coming to another set of doors. Which was locked. After looking around to make sure there was no one around, pulled the door open, leaving the lock and parts of both doors in ruins. (The action startled Willow so much that she jumped with a squeak as the doors shattered.) And with another anxious look around, she slipped inside.

Inside, the body was covered with a blanket, and lying on the bench that was between rows of lockers. No one was around, and there was no sign that anyone had even bothered to investigate the apparent murder. Gingerly, Willow lifted the blanket.
The Slayer gasped at the first dead person she had ever seen first hand. (Dead dead, not walking around vampire dead.) But she had a job to do, so all of the fear and revulsion she felt needed to wait. So Willow tilted the man's head and checked his neck…..and found two bite marks on his neck.

The man had been drained of his blood.

After checking for signs that he had been turned (luckily, he hadn't), Willow's resolve finally broke as the reality sank in: this was her life now. Not school, or her parents, or even Xander. No, Willow was the Slayer, and this meant more dead bodies, more killing, and most importantly, more death.

And it was the absolute last thing in the world that she wanted.
Don't let my silence fool you: I've been writing, but wildly out of order on all my stories (including a huge twist for the future of this story), plus a couple projects that I'm going to be sitting on for a while.

Looking defeated, Willow entered the library to find Xander lounging at the study table with an extraordinarily huge book in front of him, and Giles standing at the checkout counter looking exasperated. “Willow, I suppose-“

“They found a dead guy in a locker.”

“Yes,” replied Giles. “Word has spread across the school.”

“If there’s one thing Cordelia can do well, it’s spread gossip,” agreed Xander.

Willow stopped in the middle of the room and announced in a sullen voice, “There was a dead body, and I had to make sure he wouldn’t become a vampire.”

“And?” asked Giles.

“……No,” announced Willow as she sat down next to Xander. “He was just drained.”

“So why leave the body here?” asked Xander. “Wouldn’t it make sense to dump it where no one can find it?”

“This wasn’t a coincidence,” answered the Watcher. “Something is on the verge of happening here in Sunnydale.”

“I’m guessing that’s a bad thing,” said Willow in a sad voice. More directly to Giles, she asked, “It is a bad thing…..right?”

“I’m afraid so, yes,” he admitted. “However, it’s not entirely unexpected.”

"You realize this is Sunnydale, right?" asked Xander. "Calling it a one-Starbucks town is an insult to one-Starbucks towns."

"Dig a bit into the history of this place and you'll find there've been a stream of fairly odd occurrences," continued Giles with increasing excitement in his voice. "I believe this area is a center of mystical energy. Things gravitate toward it that you might not find elsewhere."

“Ooh!” shouted Willow excitedly as her hand shot up in the air. “Like vampires!” Xander just looked at her with a rather cold expression, which deflated her enthusiasm entirely. “Right?”

Giles leaned over the counter and produced a pile of books, which he started placing on the table in front of the two teens as he announced breathlessly, “Like werewolves. Zombies. Succubi, incubi….Everything you ever dreaded under your bed and told yourself couldn’t be by the light of day.”
“What,” asked Xander sarcastically, “did you send away for the Time Life series?”

Willow gave her best friend a dirty look, but neither he nor Giles reacted to it. instead, the librarian admitted sheepishly, “Uh, yes.”

“Did you get the free phone?” asked Willow in a naively hopeful tone of voice.

In a low voice, Giles admitted, “The calendar.”

“Cool.”

“So,” asked Willow, “what does it mean?”

“It’s getting worse.”

“**Worse?!**” shouted Willow and Xander simultaneously.

“Yes,” affirmed the Watcher. “The influx of the undead, the supernatural occurrences. It’s been building for years and now…..There’s a reason why you’ve been called, Willow. Something is going to happen here soon.”

“How soon?” asked Willow. Looking nervously at Xander, she added quietly, “I sort of have plans tonight, you know.”

Giles blanched at the prospect of his Slayer shirking her duty……for a date. (And with Xander, no less.) “As far as I can tell, the signs point to a crucial mystical upheaval very soon-days, possibly less.”

The Slayer and her best friend shared a look of pure dread. This was nowhere near what they had expected would happen today. They sat there silently for a good, long while until Xander spoke for the both of them.

“Um….yay?”
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

And out of nowhere, I have a new chapter of a story. But not the one you REALLY want. ;) (Yes, I've looked at my stats, and I know that y'all still want Buffy and Tara more than anything else.) This is in part because my writing has been in nothing even resembling story order for the past couple of years, so I've got some great stuff written that you won't be seeing for a LONG time until my brain starts working normally. But I swear, it's AWESOME.

Willow stood in front of her mirror with two outfits, neither of which she was at all satisfied with. “Xander’s seen me in everything I have,” she announced to her reflection with a frown on her face.

Well, almost everything, thought Willow as she considered her underwear briefly before blushing deeply as she recalled some of her more……vivid dreams.

Sweeping those thoughts away, Willow went back to worrying. She was facing her first real date, and there was no one to talk to. Her parents were of course gone, attending separate conferences out of town.

Not that Willow’s mother would have been much help. She only seemed to take a clinical interest in Willow’s life, which had only made her life harder, what with her long and continuing history of being a total outcast. Willow didn’t even want to think about what would happen if her parents found out she was a Vampire Slayer. It was bad enough thinking about how her father would respond about this date without something like that to consider.

Eventually, Willow settled on her blue dress with the red cuffs and collar. It was the most “adult” thing she had, and to be perfectly honest, her legs looked great while wearing it. Normally, she wore pantyhose with the dress, but a flash of inspiration (and a rush of bravery) inspired Willow to skip the hose. Putting on a pair of matching heels before applying her favorite red lipstick (“Lady Danger”), Willow stood and realized:

She looked good.

Sadly, the heels came off, replaced with socks and a sensible pair of sneakers, but for the first time in her life, Willow was certain that Xander would notice her in the way she had always hoped.

Later, as she walked towards the Bronze, Willow froze. She heard footsteps, and upon looking back the way she came, she saw a figure in the darkness. Even though his face wasn't visible, Willow was dead certain that he was watching her. Hastily, she scurried around the corner to another street, and then into an alley. There was a pipe hanging overhead and some trash cans scattered about, and given the two poor options, Willow leapt for the pipe......and was astonished to find that she reached it, despite the fact that it was a good 12 feet above the ground. She was even able to balance herself above the bar like a gymnast.

How strong am I?! thought Willow as she watched her mysterious stalker pass below, completely unaware that he was now the prey.
Rather than contemplate her powers, Willow swung down towards the man, knocking him down as she dismounted with a powerful kick to his back. However, instead of looking at her with surprise or anger this man-

*This incredibly gorgeous* man, amended Willow to herself.

Willow’s appreciation of the man’s good looks ended swiftly because of the cocky smirk on his face.

*What a jerk!*

“Is there a problem, ma’am?” he asked.

“Yeah,” confirmed Willow. “You’re following me.” *Jerk!*

“I know what you’re thinking,” he answered, “but don’t worry. I don’t bite.”

And with the mention of the word “bite”, the man’s true nature hit Willow like a ton of bricks. With a swift, catlike motion, the Slayer produced a stake and brought it down above his heart. “And why should I trust a *vampire*?”

“I didn’t say you should trust me,” answered the vampire, still smirking cockily, “but if I was evil, you’d already be dead.” To emphasize his point, the vampire grabbed Willow by the wrist and flipped her over. Now she was on her back, and the creature was pushing her arm (and, more importantly, the stake) down towards her heart. Try as she might, Willow was fighting a losing battle with this demon. After effectively proving his point, the vampire released Willow and helped her up.

“*Who are* you?!”

With a sigh, the vampire dropped with the playful act, which clearly wasn’t working with this Slayer. “My name is Angel. I’m not like other vampires.”

“Let me guess: you’re a *friendly* vampire who saves puppies and drinks chocolate milk?”

Angel froze up momentarily at the mention of saving puppies, but was less affected by the part about drinking chocolate milk. “A hundred years ago, I was cursed by gypsies after I killed a member of their clan.”

Her curiosity now piqued, Willow asked, “How did they curse you?”

“They gave me my soul back.”

“Oh,” answered Willow simply. After a moment, the gravity of Angel’s predicament sunk in. “Oh! So, what were you like……before?”

“I was just like every other vampire…..only worse. I tortured and killed everyone I encountered with a song in my heart.”

Willow felt a rush of sympathy for Angel, but something still nagged at her. “So, why are you stalking me?*“

“You’re standing at the mouth of Hell, Slayer-“

Coldly, Willow announced, “My name is Willow.”

Angel regarded this girl, who was named after a tree famous for bending but not breaking, for
fighting for its life with all its might, and in China at least, for warding off evil spirits. She was inexperienced and afraid, but underneath the shaky exterior, there was a spark of toughness and determination worthy of her name. The question remained: would it be enough? "You're on the mouth of Hell, Willow.....and it's about to open." Reaching into his jacket pocket, Angel produced a little black box, and tossed it to her.

Without much thought, Willow opened the box after catching it......and was immediately incensed. "A cross? You're giving me a cross?!"

Angel was at a loss for words. "You do know that it'll protect you from them......and me, right?"

"Yes," answered Willow, "but I'm Jewish. Doesn't the Star of David work, too?"

That was actually a pretty difficult question for Angel. Not that he hadn’t eaten any Jews in his day (he had been quite the equal opportunity ruiner of lives, after all), but none had ever shoved a Star of David in his face. “I wasn’t exactly expecting the Slayer to be you.”

Willow immediately understood what Angel meant, because she recognized the look in his eyes. (She’d seen it in the mirror every day for years.) “You were expecting that Slayer from LA. Buffy.”

Angel blanched visibly. (Willow recognized that look as well.)

"So, how is the mouth of Hell opening?" asked the Slayer. "And how do you know?"

"It's called the Harvest," answered Angel. "And I know because I've dealt with the Order of Aurelius before. They're a lot more dangerous than you think."

Willow frowned. There was that name again. Being a Slayer was sounding like a worse and worse deal. "That's what that skanky blonde vampire said she was a part of last night."

"Darla," replied Angel with an unreadable expression on his face. "Her name was Darla. If the Master is sending her after you, then you're in even greater danger than you can possibly understand."

"Because Angel the puppy-saving vampire said so?" asked Willow with a somewhat harsh perspective.

“She’s my sire.”

Willow froze. She knew exactly what the word “sire” meant, and given how swiftly Angel had outclassed her, the redhead understood the gravity of the situation. “I don’t see how that’s supposed to make me trust you.”

“I never said that you were,” replied Angel as he turned to leave. He said nothing further as he disappeared into the night.

Willow remained unconvinced that he was gone as she approached the Bronze.

Despite resembling a mundane warehouse outside, the Bronze was a large, if somewhat dingy and roach-infested, club. Willow was already quite familiar with the place (it was, after all, the only hangout in town that stayed open at night), but since this was the first time she had come here since being called as the Slayer, her entire perspective had changed.

First and foremost, Willow could feel multiple vampires in the building, and the realization that they
were the reason why she would sometimes be too afraid to stay sent chills down her spine. Worse, she could see just why the vampires came here: it was literally the easiest place to find an unsuspecting human at night. And it looked like the employees knew it, too: Willow noticed for the first time that they all had crosses on, or some sort of charm at the very least. (Oddly, the bouncer outside did not seem to be quite as concerned about such matters.) Most chilling, however, were all the dark and/or secluded corners which just screamed "death trap". And in the middle of all this, the Slayer vaguely recognized a slim brunette sitting at the bar with a conspicuously healthy fruit smoothie. "Oh my God," announced Willow a bit too loudly. "Amy?"

After an awkward moment, the girl turned to face Willow with a confused, upset expression until a sudden realization hit. "Willow? Oh, hey!"

"Wow!" exclaimed Willow. "You look great!"

"Thanks," answered Amy humbly. "Mom's been on a super training kick lately. I guess it kind of sunk in finally."

"Is that a good thing?"

"Oh, definitely," replied Amy with a generous amount of enthusiasm. "I mean, sure, it's a totally punishing workout regimen, but guys are actually starting to notice me!" Giving Willow's outfit a good once over, she asked, "Speaking of boys, are you on a date or something? Because you look great. I mean....wow."

Willow paused for a moment, as a feeling that something was wrong swept over her. It was as if ever fiber of her body was certain that Amy was not who-or what-she appeared to be. That's silly, thought Willow. It's Amy. "You think so?" asked Willow hopefully.

"Absolutely," confirmed Amy with a vigorous (too vigorous) nod. After a moment, she added with a slightly conspiratorial tone, "So......who's your date?"

With a deep blush and a shy smile on her face, Willow admitted dreamily, "Xander."

Amy's face appeared to wash over with an expression of complete disgust for a split second before she smiled broadly. "Oh, wow! You finally got him to notice you? That's great!"

Willow swooned. "I know. It's like Christmas, except not, and because hey, still Jewish."

"So," asked Amy with an oddly acidic lilt to her voice, "where is he?"

Another wave of suspicion crested in Willow's gut, but she shook it off at her friend's questioning glare. "Xander? Oh! We, uh, decided to meet here." Looking around hopefully, the Slayer frowned once she saw an all too familiar figure on the upper level of the Bronze, sticking out like a sore thumb and looking completely exasperated.

Giles.

Turning back to Amy, Willow asked, "If you see him, can you tell him that I’m here? I need to.......go to the bathroom."

“Sure thing!” replied Amy cheerfully as Willow stood up and left. However, as soon as the redhead was out of sight, she sneered and rolled her eyes before turning her attentions towards a boy that had just sat down beside her.
Willow all but stormed up the stairs to the Bronze’s balcony, and managed to sneak up on Giles as he observed the people below, his expression somewhere between disgust and astonishment.

“What are you doing here?” asked Willow with a definite annoyance in her voice.

Willow’s Watcher literally jumped in surprise upon being addressed. “What? Oh! Uh…….well, I deemed it necessary to observe things here tonight.”

“So you’re spying on me?” asked Willow, her already raised ire starting to reach a fever pitch.

“Well, not exactly,” answered Giles, receiving a withering glare in return. “You must understand that the forces of evil do not rest while you shirk your responsibility to go on a date…..with Xander.”

“Oh, I get it,” interrupted Willow. “Your friend, Angel, told me all about it. The Harvest is coming, and the Master will rise. Speaking of which, since when could vampires be cursed with souls? Wouldn’t it be better to do that than to have teenage girls like me try to kill them?”

Giles was utterly dumbfounded by this information. “A souled vampire? I can’t say I’ve ever heard of such a thing. And what was this about The Harvest? And the Master? Did he say anything more?”

Willow’s rage was replaced with concern when it became obvious that her Watcher knew nothing about Angel, or anything he had told her. “He said that the mouth of Hell would open, and that the vampire I fought last night was named Darla, and that she was his sire.”

With a heavy sigh, Giles turned his attention towards the crowd below. “Look at them. Throwing themselves about…. Completely unaware of the danger that surrounds them.”

“Must be nice,” replied Willow sadly, remembering the many, seemingly happy times she had had with Xander here. Once again, she found herself wishing that she could return to ignorance, if only for a little while.

“Have you at least been making use of your training?”

Willow sighed dramatically in response. “Yes.”

“And have you spotted any vampires?”

“Not specifically,” admitted the Slayer, “but there are some here……I think.”

Giles was not impressed. “You should be able to see them, without looking or thinking. You should know.” Willow bent over the railing and started scanning the crowd as he continued speaking. “You have to hone your senses, focus until the energy washes over you, till you can feel every particle of-“

“There’s one!” announced the Slayer proudly as she pointed towards the crowd with a smile on her face.

Giles was thrown off by the comment. “What?”

“See?” declared Willow, still pointing down at a youngish man. He was very good looking, and speaking to a girl with her back facing both Willow and Giles. “He’s so…..pale. And he’s acting strange.” After a second, she added, “And I think his clothes are kinda funny. Not ‘ha ha’ funny, I mean, more like……not right.”

Increasingly frustrated with the conversation, Giles said with a sigh, “But you’re supposed to hone…..”
But Willow wasn’t paying attention. Instead, an expression of pure dread filled her face as she started to babble. “Oh no. Nononononononono.”

As the girl’s face came into full view, Giles asked, “Do you-?”

“Yes,” interrupted the Slayer, now on the verge of panic. “It’s Amy.” Without even bothering to look in her Watcher’s direction, Willow declared, “I gotta go,” before frantically heading downstairs, shoving people aside every step of the way. By the time Willow reached the place where she had seen Amy and the vampire, they were gone.

Frantically looking around, Willow’s gaze fell on a door near the stage. With no other option seeming appealing, she started pushing aside everything in her path as she approached the unattended door sitting in one of the darker corners of the Bronze.

After finally fighting through the increasingly dense crowd, Willow entered the backstage door, finding only a deserted, quiet room filled with wooden chairs, tables, and other supplies strewn about in a seemingly random fashion.

Even though she had a little bit of Slaying experience, Willow was in a state of near panic as she walked through the room towards the exit door. While passing by one of the stacks of chairs, the Slayer had the presence of mind to snap off one of the legs, making herself a makeshift stake, just in case.

Upon reaching the exit, Willow opened the door and peaked out. Finding no sign of Amy or her undead paramour, she headed back towards the main stage. Upon turning a corner, Willow pounced on someone, grabbing them by the neck and holding them two feet above ground.

To Willow’s eternal horror, the person was none other than Cordelia Chase. And, even worse, she was flanked by three Cordettes.

“Cordelia?”

“God, what is your childhood trauma?!” screeched Cordelia as Willow released her.

“I-I’m sorry,” croaked Willow, her face turning a deep red. “I was j-just looking for Amy….,”

“Why?” interrupted Cordelia in an increasingly hostile tone of voice. “Did you need to attack her with a stick?”

Without even so much as a peep, Willow dashed away. Cordelia, meanwhile, fished out her cell phone out of her purse while declaring to her Cordettes, “Excuse me. I have to call everyone that I have ever met right now.”

Willow blew right past Giles as she continued looking around the Bronze, desperately looking for any signs of Amy and the vampire. “Is he dea-?”

“No!” shouted Willow, the panic rising in her voice. “I didn’t find them.”

“Do you need my help?”

“Maybe you can….” The Slayer turned to her Watcher and quickly reconsidered. “No. I’ll be fine.”
Giles, not being a complete fuddy duddy, recognized that Willow was covering up her emotional turmoil. “Are you sure? I’m perfectly willing to—“

“No,” declared Willow, her Resolve Face now in full effect. “I can handle it.”

“Well, then,” answered Giles with a hint of surprise in his voice, “I’d best go to the library to research this ‘Harvest’—“

He didn’t even bother completing the sentence because Willow had already disappeared into the throngs of teenagers.

……But not before passing by Jesse, who was speaking to a girl. “What did you say your name was?”

The girl, whom Willow already knew professionally, smiled with a rehearsed sweetness as she spoke.

“Darla.”
Willow was so wrapped up in her search for Amy that she nearly bowled over Xander as she finished circling around the back of The Bronze. “Xander!”

“Oh, hey, Will!” answered Xander nervously. And the reason why was almost instantly clear to the Slayer. Xander had dressed up… or at least tried to. His choice in clothing was still as indescribably horrible as it usually was, but it looked like he was actually trying to look nice. And was that cologne?

Willow certainly hoped so, because whatever it was smelled terrible.

“I hope you’re not mad that I’m late-“

“Amy left with a vampire,” interrupted Willow, the worry evident on her face.

“Are you-?” The swift appearance of Resolve Face made it crystal clear that Willow was not joking. “We’ve gotta help her,” replied Xander simply and steadfastly.

“I can do this myself,” answered Willow definitively. “I have to.”

“Sure,” argued Xander, “but we’re like Butch and Sundance. It doesn’t work if we’re not together.”

Increasingly cognizant of how long this discussion was taking, Willow relented. “Fine,” she stated as she produced a stake and handed it to her friend. “But you do exactly as I say.”

“And I do exactly as you do?”

Willow answered with a stern look that even to someone not them stated clearly that now was not the time for bad jokes. “Come on,” she declared before heading off.

Amy looked around the mausoleum her date had taken her to with a judgmental eye. “Are you sure that this is a good place to go?”

“Only the best for you, baby,” replied the vampire, clearly losing his patience with the teen.

“Is this the best you could do?” asked a woman’s voice.

Both Amy and her date whipped their heads towards the new occupant of the room. While Amy was clearly annoyed by her presence, the boy acted as if he knew her. If Willow and Xander were present, they would have, too: it was Darla. “She’s fresh,” he answered snidely.

“Hardly enough to share,” dismissed Darla, which earned a cold look from Amy.

The male vampire was still annoyed as he said, “Why didn’t you bring your own?”

“I did,” answered Darla smugly, just as Jesse stumbled into the room behind her.

“Hey,” replied Jesse as he stumbled into the mausoleum, “Wait up….” The boy was stumbling around and looked very pale, and on top of it all, he was holding onto his neck. After a moment, he noticed Amy, and greeted her weakly. “Hey, Amy……Did you change your hair?”
Amy, who hadn’t even batted an eye at Jesse’s arrival, glared quietly at him for a second before expressing concern over his neck, which was drenched with something. “You’re bleeding!”

The boy vampire looked at Darla with a questioning look, to which she answered with a shrug and a smile, “I got hungry on the way.”

“Hungry?” asked Amy with an audible gasp.

“Yes,” answered the blonde confidently, “and you’re next!” Darla lunged at Amy as her face shifted into its vampiric form, causing the brunette to jump backwards with shock and fear. Unfortunately, she fell into the arms of her date, whose face had also turned into its demonic form. With a scream, Amy backed away again, tripping and falling to the ground as her attackers drew near.

“I thought I made it clear that I’d kill you if you hurt my friends.”

Amy, both vampires, and a fading Jesse turned their attention to the new voice in the room to find Willow.

An extremely pissed off Willow. “Back off, Darla.”

“You might want to reconsider taking me on again,” sneered the vampire. “I won’t make the same mistake that I did last time.”

As Darla was speaking, the other vampire circled around the room, and charged Willow from behind. Unfortunately for him, she produced a stake from her sleeve and held it out, not even turning to look as he impaled himself on the weapon and fell to the ground in agony as his body turned to dust, with the remnants scattering all over the floor.

“Xander,” replied the Slayer matter-of-factly to her best friend whose mouth was gaping in awe of the feat he had just seen as he stood in the doorway to the mausoleum, “take Amy and Jesse and get out of here. Now.”

“O-okay,” murmured Xander as he moved towards Amy and Jesse.

“Don’t go too far,” taunted Darla confidently, “This won’t take long.”

Willow answered by punching the vampire in the face, which knocked her to the ground as Xander and Amy helped the still-woozy Jesse outside. “Leave my friends alone.”

Before either Slayer or vampire could react, a pair of hands grabbed onto Willow’s neck in a sudden fashion, and lifted her from the ground like a rag doll. “Make me.” Stepping out of the shadows was the vampire whose hands were around the Slayer’s neck, a towering mass of muscle and rage that threw Willow clear across the room before turning his attention to Darla as she stood up.

“You were supposed to be bringing an offering for the Master. We’re almost at Harvest and you dally with this….child?”

“We had someone,” spat out Darla spitefully. “But the Slayer here gets all bitchy when we so much as look at her friends, and killed Thomas. I wouldn’t underestimate her, Luke.”

Luke was having none of Darla’s complaints, however, and declared with a sneer, “You go. I’ll see if I can handle the little girl.”
Willow stood up just as Luke closed in on and grabbed her. However, she was ready, and gave him a swift kick to his groin, which stunned Luke long enough for her to punch him square in the jaw, further staggering the hulking vampire.

“You are strong,” replied Luke…

…..before turning towards Willow and slamming her back down to the floor.

“But I’m stronger.”

As they neared the edge of the cemetery with surprising haste, Xander and Amy started going in different directions, yanking a barely conscious Jesse back and forth in their struggle.

“What are you doing?” asked Amy. “We need to get the police!”

“They can’t help,” argued Xander firmly, clearly more concerned with Jesse. “We need to go to school, and get Giles.”

“Are you….sure….?” asked Amy, her voice falling off as she and Xander both noticed the three vampires now surrounding them.

“You’re wasting my time,” groused Luke as he chased her slowly around the tomb in the center of the mausoleum.

Willow, now quite annoyed with how her evening had turned out, snapped back, “I’m sorry that my date got in the way of you trying to kidnap and murder two of my friends.” She emphasized her pointed by rushing in on Luke and punching him quite strongly yet again in the jaw before backing off again.

With a mighty shove, Luke sent the lid of the tomb flying, but Willow swiftly ducked and rolled out of its path. This gave the vampire the advantage, though, as he loomed over the Slayer before she could get up.

“You think you can stop me?” gloated Luke as he closed in. “Stop us?”

It was as Willow’s hands blindly looked for a weapon that she hit pay dirt. Or, at least, a little black box, which had fallen out of her outfit at some point and was lying on the floor upside down, hiding its contents. So, as surreptitiously as she could, Willow grabbed ahold of the cross-

-Sorry, Dad.

…and grabbed onto Luke’s hand, marveling as smoke began to rise and the smell of something burning-

-Huh, so that’s what burning flesh smells like.

-just before Luke yanked back his hand, giving Willow the opening to escape as she shoved the massive vampire aside roughly.

Though roughed up quite thoroughly, Willow was able to approach the edge of the cemetery rather quickly. However, she didn’t see Xander, Jesse, or Amy at all.
And then, as if on cue, someone screamed.

Someone female.

“Amy!”

Running towards the sound of Amy’s voice, Willow found her pinned to the ground by a vampire. Moving purely on instinct, the Slayer kicked the demon in his face, knocking him down where he held his apparently broken nose as blood trickled through his hands. Next, upon hearing the sound of something being dragged, she found two vampires dragging an unconscious Xander, and raged as she punched one hard enough that it knocked both over. Now beyond furious, Willow yanked a branch off a tree and used it to stake both vampires before hurrying to Xander’s side.

“Xander, are you OK?”

Groggily, Xander replied, “Man….something hit me…..”

Amy, still a bit shaken, was looking around fearfully as she asked, “Aren’t you going to look for…..”

“Oh God,” interrupted Willow as she too started looking around. “Jesse. Where is he?”

“They were on top of us too fast,” answered Amy.

“Darla took him,” declared Xander as he sat up.

“Which way?”

“I don’t know, Will.”

Standing up, Willow clenched her fists as she struggled to fight back tears. “Jesse….,”
Chapter 9

Willow, Xander, and Amy, all three looking as if they had gotten no sleep the previous night, sat at the study table in the library as they listened to Giles speak. Willow, still recovering from her fight, had a bandage visible around her forearm.

“This world is older than any of you know, and contrary to popular mythology, it did not begin as a paradise. For untold eons, Demons walked the earth; made it their home….their Hell.”

Willow and Xander, by now familiar with this sort of talk from Giles, let their eyes glaze over with worry as their thoughts turned to Jesse. Amy, however, was listening intently.

“In time they lost their purchase on this reality, and the way was made for the mortal animals. For Man. What remains of the Old Ones are vestiges: Certain magicks….”

“Magic?” interrupted Amy hastily.

“Yes,” confirmed Giles, completely missing Amy’s slightly manic tone of voice. “But there are also certain creatures, as well….”

“Like vampires,” finished Willow.

“Exactly,” replied the Watcher, receiving a broad smile from his Slayer. “The books tell that the last Demon to leave this reality fed off a human, mixed their blood. He was a human form possessed-infected-by the Demon's soul. He bit another, and another….and so they walk the earth, feeding. Killing some, mixing their blood with others to make more of their kind. Waiting for the animals to die out, and the Old Ones to return.”

Luke and Darla stood before the Master’s altar with Jesse, who while conscious, was barely in any condition to put up a fight, even if he could. Unfortunately for the boy, his situation quickly got even worse, as the Master appeared from out of the shadows and in full command of the situation.

Regarding Jesse, he asked, “Is this for me?”

Luke was the first to speak. “An offering, Master.”

“He’s a good one,” replied Darla, clearly trying to curry favor. “His blood is pure.”

Almost immediately it became clear that Darla had made a big mistake, even as the Master displayed no emotion. “You’ve tasted it.”

“I’m your faithful dog,” continued the Master with a truly sinister smile. “You bring me scraps.”

“Tastes like dog to-“

“I’ve waited,” interrupted the Master, his patience clearly being tested. “For three score years I have waited. While you come and go I have been stuck here-here, in a house of worship. My ascension is almost at hand. Pray that when it comes…..I’m in a better mood.”

Still desperate to plead her case, Darla continued. “Master, forgive me. We had more offerings but the Slayer-“
“The Slayer?” questioned the Master.

“What’s that?” asked Amy.

“As long as there have been vampires,” answered Giles, “there has been the Slayer. One girl in all the world.”

“This is his favorite part,” declared Xander, earning him a slap on the arm from Willow. “Ow!”

With a sigh, Giles condensed his traditional spiel. “All right: They hunt vampires, one Slayer dies, the next is called, Willow is the Slayer, don’t tell anyone. I think that’s all the vampire information you need.”

Willow, having seen all of her friends attacked by vampires over the past few days, asked with a bit of an edge to her voice, “You’re not even going to tell her how to kill them?”

Now annoyed with his charge, Giles replied, “As I have made perfectly clear, it is not the job of your friends to kill vampires. It is yours.”

Xander interrupted this time, an undercurrent of rage in his voice. “Well, there’s a lot more of them out there than Willow. And if you haven’t noticed, they have Jesse.”

“And they’d have me if not for both of you,” murmured Amy.

“And that’s my fault,” answered Willow, refusing to look at her Watcher as she said so. “That big guy, Luke, he said that you and Jesse were supposed to be offerings for the Master. And Angel said that he was in charge of that Order.”

“Who’s Angel?” asked Xander.

“He’s a vampire,” answered Willow. “He said he had a soul? I didn’t like him very much.”

“Well, yeah,” answered Xander, “because he’s a vampire and needs to be killed. Right, G-man?”

“I’m not so sure it’s that simple,” replied Giles, happily ignoring Xander’s nickname for him. “If he has, as he claims, a soul, it’s very possible that this ‘Angel’ is an ally against the, uh…..” Checking his notes that were on the table in front of him, Giles continued, “Order of Aurelius.”

“So, maybe he knows where they took Jesse?” asked Amy helpfully.

“He didn’t exactly tell me how to call him,” groused Willow. To no one in particular she added, “Why are all the super-hot guys total jerks?”

Following a rather awkward pause, Giles helpfully suggested, “It’s thoroughly possible that these vampires live underground.”

“Well, there’s electrical tunnels,” offered Xander. “They run under the whole town.”

“If we had a diagnostic of the tunnel system, it might indicate a meeting place,” suggested Giles. “I suppose we could go to the building commission.”

“That’d take too long,” declared Xander.

“Uh, guys?” suggested Willow. “There may be another way.”
“She mustn’t be allowed to interfere with the Harvest,” declared the Master.


Darla, seizing the opportunity, spoke. “Well, this boy knows the Slayer. He’s her friend.” The last word was stated with enough condescension so as to illustrate her point.

“Interesting,” answered the Master, as he considered what Darla was suggesting with a devilish smile on his face while he stroked his chin. “Then perhaps this boy will serve a greater purpose after all.”
Sitting at the computer with an image of some blueprints on the screen, Willow pointed at one particular pathway. “This runs under the graveyard.”

“I don’t see any access,” answered Xander.

Ever curious, Giles asked, “So all the city plans are just open to the public?”

Willow’s expression immediately turned sheepish. “Uh, well, in a way. I sort of stumbled onto them when I accidentally….decrypted the city council’s security system.”

“Someone’s been naughty,” replied Xander in a gently teasing voice.

“This doesn’t make any sense!” complained Willow through gritted teeth. “There’s no entrance, but they had to go somewhere. And Luke, he-“

Suddenly, Willow froze.

Amy looked at Willow with a questioning glance. “What?”

“Luke didn’t come from nowhere. He came from behind. And he never followed after me.”

Putting it all together, Willow declared, “The entrance is in the mausoleum.”

“Are you sure?” asked Giles.

Her eyes distant as she ran through what happened in her mind, Willow confirmed with a slow nod, “Yes. I’m positive.”

“So the vampires doubled back to the mausoleum?” asked Amy.

Willow nodded guiltily. “Yes.”

“Well, what’s the plan?” asked Xander, ready for action. “We saddle up, right?”

“No,” answered Willow, her voice barely above a whisper.

“What?!” replied Xander and Amy in surprised unison.

“It’s my responsibility,” declared Willow firmly, “and it’s my fault that Jesse is with those….things right now.” Her voice again becoming very quiet, the Slayer added, “And I’d never be able to forgive myself if something happened to you guys, too.”

Xander and Amy were taken aback, but Xander was the first to respond. “We can’t just sit around waiting for you to get back, Will. There has to be something we can do.”
“You can help me,” answered Giles. “I’ve been researching this Harvest affair. Seems to be some sort of pre-ordained massacre. Rivers of blood, Hell on earth….Quite charmless. I am fuzzy on the details, however, and it may be that one of you can wrest some information from that dread machine.”

The three teenagers looked at Giles as if he had grown an extra head.

“That was a bit British, wasn’t it?”

“I was going to go with ‘old fart’, myself,” offered Amy helpfully.

Suppressing his annoyance for a moment, Giles said, “Yes, well. Which one of you knows enough about the computer to help while Willow is gone?”

Completely bypassing Xander, Willow asked, “Amy?”


Amy finally answered, her face turning from a look of pure annoyance that no one seemed to notice to one that was far more innocent. “Yes, I can do it. I think.”

“Good,” replied Willow, nodding. And to everyone she declared, “Well, I guess I’m gonna go now, and try not to die or anything.” With a hopeful tone of voice she added, “Wish me luck!”

The hopeful tone did not last very long, as Willow was greeted with three very worried faces. Her optimism dashed, the redhead frowned before leaving without a word.

Outside, Willow made her way to an open gate at the perimeter of school grounds, only to be blocked by Principal Flutie, who appeared perturbed. “And where do we think we’re going?” he asked.

Now thoroughly spooked, Willow “W-what? I mean, me?”

Continuing with the odd pronoun usage, Principal Flutie asked, “We’re not leaving school grounds, are we?”

“How?” asked Willow, now completely flustered. “I mean, no! Not at all!”

“Because if we were leaving school grounds after some recent incidents where we may have been disruptive…..do you see where I’m going with this?”

Somehow, despite internally panicking, Willow finally stumbled upon an answer: “Mr. Giles!”

And finally, Principal Flutie was the one caught off guard. “What?”

Confidently, Willow declared, “He asked me to get a book for him, from the store, since I have a free period and he knows that I’m very friendly with the……books.”

“Mr. Giles.”

Willow nodded eagerly, too eagerly in fact, as she said, “Can you ask him?”

Instead, Flutie shut the gate and locked it before dismissing the idea. “Well, maybe that’s how they do things in Britain, they’ve got that royal family and all kinds of problems. But here at
Sunnydale nobody leaves campus while school's in session. Are we clear?"

Contritely, Willow answered, “Yes, Mr. Flutie.”

“Good,” declared the principal, now quite satisfied with himself. “I wouldn’t want to think that you’re becoming the type of girl who breaks rules and goes wherever she wants.” And with a self-assured grin, he left.

As soon as Principal Flutie was out of sight, Willow approached the gate, and after regarding the lock for a second, she crushed it in her hand, twisting the loop until it broke apart like Play-Doh. And after a careful look around to see if she was noticed, the Slayer opened the gate, snuck out, and ran off.

Arriving at the mausoleum, Willow made a beeline for the now much more obvious entrance to Sunnydale’s sewers, only to find it locked with something far more sturdy than the simple padlock she had crushed minutes ago. After a frustrated tug on it, she announced with great annoyance, “I don’t suppose you’ve got a key on you?”

“That’s the thing about getting back your soul,” answered Angel with a bit of smirk on his face, “All your old friends decide to change the locks.”

_Jerk! “Would it have been too much for you to at least get something to break the lock before I got here?”_

“Maybe,” answered Angel, again in a tone that Willow found to be supremely grating, “but I figured that you would be able to take care of it yourself. Though I must admit that I thought it’d be a bit sooner.”

“Well, I’m sorry that I had to sleep and go to school and everything,” replied Willow harshly as she glared icily at the vampire before kicking at the locked doors, shattering the chain that held the lock in place and jarring the doors from their supports.

“I wouldn’t go down there if I were you,” warned Angel.

“My friend is down there,” fired back Willow, her annoyance beginning to boil over. “It wouldn’t hurt to come with me and help find him, you know.”

“They don’t like me very much,” answered Angel matter-of-factly.

“And you think that they’re going to be waiting for me with a cake?” asked the Slayer, clearly having had her fill of Angel’s smug, coy attitude.

“You should be more concerned about the Harvest,” fired back Angel. “It’s tonight, and if you don’t stop it, the Master walks.”

With gritted teeth, Willow replied darkly, “Well, since you obviously have no interest in helping me right now or stopping the Master tonight, maybe you can go to school and tell Mr. Giles what you know.” The tone of her voice made it pretty clear that Willow didn’t consider the statement to be a request. “Or, you know, wish me luck like a normal person would.”

Completely avoiding the Slayer’s demand, Angel simply said, “When you hit the tunnels, head east, toward the school. That’s where you’re likely to find them.”

Willow considered Angel for a moment before answering contritely, “Thank you.”
Awkwardly, the two said nothing for a full moment before the Slayer took off into the tunnels. Staying behind, Angel looked on with concern before whispering, “Good luck.”

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